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Report: States' implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the Australian Curriculum: A comparison of the change process in two countries.

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This report presents the first comprehensive evaluation of key elements of the actions that states in the USA and Australia took to implement the Common Core State Standards or Phase One of the Australian Curriculum.

The report presents the findings of a three-year study, consisting of the following components:

1. Antecedent conditions affecting policymaking and key national initiatives associated with the Common Core State Standards and the Australian Curriculum are discussed.
2. A rubric adapted from a diagnostic tool, developed by Achieve and the U.S. Education Delivery Institute, was used to analyse state-level implementation of these innovations focusing on the preliminary phase, 'organise to implement', and the first two implementation actions: 'align instructional materials'; and 'train educators'.
3. The rubric was used to analyse the actions of 46 states and the District of Columbia in implementing the Common Core State Standards and eight states and territories in implementing Phase One of the Australian Curriculum.

4. The results, which show that the strengths of states' capacities varied widely across the preliminary phase and the two implementation actions, focused on the following aspects:

The preliminary phase sets out a process for a state education agency to organise implementation based on seven building blocks: aspiration; internal leadership team; timeline; budget; gap analysis; guiding coalition; and communications. The capacity of states in the USA and Australia were equal and strong for aspiration and internal leadership team. Although states in both countries varied widely from weak to strong for guiding coalition, the capacities of states in the USA and Australia were equal. On the other hand, the capacities of states in Australia were weaker than states in the USA for timeline, gap analysis, budget and communications, although there were wide variances between states in both countries.

Implementation action one sets out a process for a state education agency to disseminate aligned instructional materials to teachers. A pattern of north-eastern and mid-western states using local-level procedures and south-eastern, southern and western states using state-level procedures to adopt instructional materials persists in the USA. A pattern of all states and territories using local-level procedures to adopt instructional materials prevails in Australia. The capacity of 19 states in the USA that use state-level procedures to provide delivery plans for selecting, procuring and distributing adopted materials to teachers is stronger than states in the USA or Australia that use local-level procedures.

Implementation action two sets out a process for a state education agency to support high quality or promising providers to train teachers and monitor teachers' participation in professional development. The delivery plans that states use to train teachers are complex. Professional development is provided directly to teachers by state education agencies, regional structures, districts or vendors, or indirectly by electronic means, professional associations, intermediary organisations or train-the-trainer models. In the USA, state education agencies depend on the widespread use of train-the-trainer models to train large numbers of teachers. In contrast, state education agencies in Australia do not use train-the-trainer models extensively, but it is more difficult to understand the nature of the training provided to teachers, because this information is not easily accessible to the public.

Interested readers can contact the author at michaelgwatt@internode.on.net to obtain a copy of the report.

Biographical note

Michael G. Watt taught in several secondary schools in Tasmania, and worked as an education officer in the Tasmania Department of Education. He holds masters' degrees in educational studies and education from the University of Tasmania, and a doctorate in education from the University of Canberra. He currently works as an education consultant.

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